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ABSTRACT

Prompted by a report of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), which noted a correlation between regional minority population and newsroom employment, a study investigated the hiring patterns of 24 small and medium-sized California dailies. California was chosen because it has one of the highest non-white populations in the nation (about 25% of the state's 26 million). Newspaper editors, publishers, and personnel officers were asked about the number and percentages of non-whites working in professional news gathering, editing, or management positions. The data indicated the percentage of non-whites holding professional positions on medium-sized and small dailies in California is considerably higher than the national average of 5.6 %. For six of the medium-sized papers, the percentage was 12%. However, for 18 small newspapers, the percentage was 4.9%. For both groups, the average was 8.4%. For metropolitan dailies in the state, the figure was 12.7%. The statewide average, including small, medium, and metropolitan dailies, was 9.8%, still higher than the national figure. (Tables of data are included.) (HOD)

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Non-Whites in California Newsrooms: A Study of Hiring Patterns of Selected Newspapers

by

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ABSTRACT

Non-Whites in Newsrooms in California:
A Study of Hiring Patterns of Selected Newspapers

Given its racial mix, are California newspapers hiring more ethnic minorities than dailies elsewhere in the nation? The American Society of Newspaper Editors stated in a report there is a correlation between regional minority population and newsroom employment. This paper investigates the hiring patterns of 24 small and medium sized dailies seeking the number and percentages of non-whites in newsrooms. Local population figures are included in this study. The results are compared with ASNE data. The results indicate that the percentage of non-whites in newsrooms do not support ASNE's conclusion, although the California figures are slightly higher --at least among medium sized dailies --than the national average.

Since 1978, the American Society of Newspaper Editors has sought to increase the number of ethnic minorities working in professional positions in newspaper newsrooms across the nation. When the ASNE announced its goal that year, the percentage of non-whites working in newsrooms was slightly more than four percent. The goal of the ASNE was --and still is --to increase that percentage so that it would be proportional to the population on a regional basis from four percent to 17 percent by the year 2000. In terms of numbers, a 1984 ASNE study showed that of a total newsroom workforce of 49,600 nationwide, 2,862 were ethnic minorities.[1]

In early 1986, the newspaper industry's minority employment percentage was 5.6 percent, a 1.6 percent gain in seven years. At the rate that the percentage has grown in that period --a .25 percent per year --it would require four years to achieve one percent. Or stated differently, it will be 44 years to achieve a 11.4 percent gain --the balance between 5.6 percent and the ASNE's goal of 17 percent. That would be twice the amount of time the Association had predicted in 1978.

Clearly, the ASNE's objective is lagging behind schedule. The question is why. Or perhaps the goal is unrealistic. Why are not more newspapers hiring more ethnic minorities? To help attain this goal, the ASNE has been conducting a series of regional seminars for newspaper editors across the nation hoping to make editors more aware of the goals and to make the editors aware of the importance of hiring more non-white employees.

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1. American Society of Newspaper Editors, "Regional Minority Population/ Newspaper Employment Summary," 1985, Washington, D.C.

At the seminars, minority newsroom employees have offered perspectives why non-whites have been reluctant to seek jobs as newspaper reports. They also have vented some frustrations regarding newspaper management policies, editor's lack of sensitivities, feeling isolated, being "ghettoized" and so on. Editors are also allowed to share problems and ideas on how newspapers can more effectively recruit and retain more non-white reporters.

There are many reasons why non-whites traditionally have not been attracted to careers in the newspaper field: few role models, relatively low pay, feeling isolated, lack of language skills, poor advising at high schools. But in addition to those reasons, there are two inter-related problems which help compound the employment problem facing the newspaper industry: First, large metropolitan newspapers' policies of hiring mostly experienced reporters who have been trained on smaller papers, and second, the reluctance of non-white reporters to seek out beginning newspaper jobs on smaller papers in rural America.

Regarding the first reason, large city dailies simply don't like to train reporters and expect them to join the publications knowing how to report, write and edit. A few newspapers and newspaper groups have recognized this policy has worked against their goal of seeking to hire more ethnic minorities and have taken action to correct this problem. This will be discussed later.

The second reason involves the reluctance by ethnic minorities to apply for newspaper jobs in small towns, presumably because small communities do not offer the amentities of large cities. And generally speaking, most small towns do not have large populations of Blacks, Asians, Hispanices, Native Americans, although there are always exceptions.

Hence the problem: About 61 percent of the nation's 1400-odd daily newspapers still do not employ non white reporters. Given the fact that two thirds of the nation's dailies are small and medium-sized newspapers, such papers have traditionally been the places from which metropolitan publications have hired employees.[2]

According to an ASNE study, "there is a correlation between regional minority populatoin and newsroom employment. The West North Central region, for example, has the lowest minoirty population percentage, 5.79, and the largest percentage of newspapers with no minority newsroom employees, 50 percent. The West South Central, on the other hand, has the highest percentage of minorities, 28.1 per/and the lowest percentage of newspapers with no minority employment, 18.6. But the figures may be skewed.The West South central trailed the other eight regions with a 40.7 percent response to the ASNE study. Conversely, the West NOrth Central had the highest response, 58.9. The national response was 54 percent."[3]

Because California has one of the highest non-white populations in the nation (about 25 percent of the state's 26 million) this investigator sought to determine if the /national figures cited by the ASNE were comparable to those in California. With its racial mix, do small and medium sized newspapers in the state have a higher percentage of non whites working in newsrooms than in newsrooms nationally.

For purposes of this study, this investigator used two groups of newspapers. One group involves medium sized circulation dailies of 50,000. The second group involves small dailies having circulations of under 50,000.*

2. American Society of Newspaper Editors, "Summary of Newspapers With No Minority News Department Professionals," Washington, D.C. 1985.

3. Ibid.

* Newspapers selected for this study were chosen on the basis of their geographic location on the assumption that papers in areas with significant non-white populations would employ a higher than average number of ethnic minorities, and visa-versa.

This investigator surveyed newspaper editors, publishers and personnel officers throughout the state. Letters were mailed to 59 newspapers asking the number and percentages of non whites working in professional news gathering, editing or management positions. The query did not ask about gender. Responses were received from 24 newspapers, a response rate of 38 percent, or 20 percent of the state's 115 dailies.

Based on data received from 24 papers, the percentage of non-whites holding professional positions on medium-sized and small dailies in California is considerably higher than the national average of 5.6 percent. For six medium-sized papers, the percentage was 12 percent. However, for 18 small newspapers, the percentage was much lower 4.79 percent. For both groups, the average was 8.4 percent. For major metropolitan dailies in the state (San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego) the figure was 12.7 percent.[4] The statewide average including small, medium and metropolitan dailies, the average was 9.8 percent, still higher than the national figure.

The small papers queried in this study were the Napa Register, the Lodi News Sentinel; the Dublin Herald, the Salinas California; the Red Bluff DAily News; the Watsonville Pajaonian; the Santa Barbara News Press; the Santa Rose Press Democrat; the Redding Record-Searchlight; the Chico Enterprise-Record; the Santa Cruz Sentinel; the Davis Enterprise; theGilroy Dispatch; the Imperial Valley Free Press, the Roseville Press Tribune; the Turlock Journal; the Ventura Star Free Press; and the Monterey Peninsula Herald. Area populations are included. As can be seen on Table I, the small papers employed a total newsroom force of 461 employees of whom 27 were non-white, or 4.79 percent.

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4 Donald L. Guimary, "Ethnic Minorities in California's Major Market Newspaper and Television Stations," Journalism Quarterly, 61:4 (1984).

TABLE I *

CITY AND NEWSPAPER	AREA POPULATION	NON-WHITE POPULATION and %		TOTAL NEWS STAFF AND NON-WHITE Percentage	
Chico Enterprise-Record	26,603	9,573	35	0/32	0%
Davis Enterprise	36,640	5,007	14	1/16	.06
Dublin Herald	82,602	9,168	11	0/20	0
Gilroy Dispatch	21,641	7,307	34	2/16	12.0
Imperial Valley Press	9,2110	40,649	50	5/24	20.0
Lodi News Sentinel	35,221	3,433	10	0/10	0
Napa Register	50,879	3,458	.07	1/7	14.0
Red Bluff Daily News	9,490	483	.05	0/6	0
Redding Record-Searchlight	41,995	1,766	.04	0/30	0
Roseville Press Tribune	24,347	2,118	8.0	2/16	7.0
Salinas Californian	80,479	29,613	37	5/20	25.0
Santa Barbara News Press	74,414	5,707	7.0	2/53	.03
Santa Cruz Sentinel	41,483	4,128	10	1/32	.03
Santa Rosa Press Democrat	83,320	3,321	.03	2/60	.03
Turlock Journal	26,287	3,321		1/12	8.0
Ventura Star Free Press (county)	113,184	60,697	54	3/42	.07
Watsonville Pajaronian	23,543	8,490	36	1/20	.05
Monterey Peninsula Herald	27,558	3,321	1.2	1/45	.02
				TOTALS 27/461	Avg. 4.79

* Census of Population, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1980. Data on newsroom staffs provided by above newspapers. The ethnicity of minority groups in rural areas and cities is usually Mexican-American.

TABLE II **
Medium Circulation Dailies

CITY AND NEWSPAPER	AREA POPULATION	NON-WHITE POPULATION AND %		TOTAL NEWS STAFF AND NON-WHITE PERCENTAGE	
Bakersfield Californian	39,889	25,242	63%	11/89	12%
Fresno Bee	218,202	61,701	28	10/99	10
Long Beach Press Telegram	50,450	24,288	48	11/78	13
Modesto Bee	106,602	11,855	11	9/65	13
Sacramento BEE	783,381	150,604	10	13/138	10
Stockton Record	149,779	51,822	35	7/NA	--

The medium sized newspapers included the Fresno Bee; the Modesto Bee; the Sacramento Bee; the Long Beach Press Telegram; the Stockton Record and the Bakersfield Californian. The percentages of non white employees working on these papers averaged 12 percent. Not all of the newspapers would provide a total number of their newsroom staffs; hence, only percentages were made available. It is interesting to note that in some cities where there is a higher than average percentage of ethnic minorities, such as Bakersfield or Long BEach, the newspapers in those communities employed more than 10 percent non whites on their staffs, but not in proportion to the local population. And such hiring patterns do not follow in other larger communities such as Sacramento.

** Census of Population, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1980. Data on newsroom staffs provided by above newspapers.

The low percentage of non-white employees at small dailies in California was similar to data from another survey done by the editor of the Merced Sun Star, who, for his own purposes, queried 14 small dailies in early 1985 from "Redding to El Cajon." His study found 16 non-whites out of a total workforce of 306 on the 14 papers which represented .05 percent of the total. He described the problem as a "Catch 22." Not one of the papers he surveyed had a recruitment program designed to recruit ethnic minorities.[5]

Of the 18 small newspapers responding to this investigator's study, five employed no non-whites --27 percent. According to the ASNE study, 12.5 percent of daily newspapers in California employed no ethic minorities. The difference in percentages might be explained by the number of responses in both studies. The ASNE also found that California newspapers ranked 41st out of 45 newspapers in terms of having low non-white employment percentages/ (Newspapers in Louisiana, New Jersey, New Mexico, the District of Columbia and Hawaii had lower scores.)

As can be seen from the above data, the pattern of employment of non-whites at small and medium sized California dailies appears to be similar to the pattern nationwide --although to a lesser degree. California editors have the same problems as their counterparts elsewhere, even with the state's racial plurality.

If smaller dailies are not hiring ethnic minorities, where are the larger papers going to find experienced and competent reporters, copy editors, sports writers and photographers. In a sense, the problem feeds on itself. Unless, however, metropolitan dailies adopt different policies such as what the Los Angeles Times has started. In 1984, the LA Times initiated its METPRO program, at a cost of $250,000, in which the paper made a special effort to recruit and train non white potential persons interested in a career in journalism.

5. Bruce Fogelby Editor, Merced Sun Star, Merced, CAlif. ASNE Regional Seminar on in the Newsroom Stanford, University, Jan.24, 1985.

Other newspaper groups such as Gannett and Dow Jones also have begun programs in which journalism scholarships are provided ethnic minority students.

And some newspapers, even small ones, have stepped up their recruiting programs designed to attract more non-whites to the field. Two newspapers editors told this investigator they have started active recruitment programs. As one editor wrote: "For the past two years, the Californian (in Bakersfield) has embarked upon a minority hiring program whereby half of our new hires will be minorities until the newsroom percentages approximate those of our readership area. We believe a newspaper cannot truly reflect its community unless it is reppesented proportionately by its various ethnic segments."[6] An official at the Long Beach Press Telegram noted: "We recently initiated a program, 'The Minority Journalism Seminar," which was open to qualified high school seniors interested in a career in journalism. We enrolled 20 students and they attended weekly evening sessions between October and early January. Each week a minority media person was the guest speaker."[7]

As noted earlier, the ASNE seminars provide a vehicle for editors, publishers and reporters to have brainstorming sessions to share ideas, problems, frustrations and solutions. Many ideas for new programs have been expressed. But not all newspaper editors and publishers choose to attend the seminars, however. Not all editors and publishers have a committment to ASNE goals. As one editor stated at a seminar, the most important factor involved in hiring and in attaining ASNE goals is a committment by newspaper management. Based on the results of this survey, which is slightly higher than the averages of the ASNE report, newspapers in California are hiring more ethnic minorities.

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6. Robert Bentley, Managing Editor, Bakersfield CAlifornian ,letter,Jan.16,1985

7. Kathy Berry, Public Relations Manager,Long Beach Press Telegram,letter,Feb.8,1985.

In sum, the results of this study do not support ASNE's statement that there is a correlation between regional minority population and newsroom --at least in California. As TAbles I and II, indicate, in areas where there is a relatively high percentage of non whites, such as in Watsonville (35 percent), the local paper, the Pajaronian, employs only one member of its 20-person staff, or 5 percent. The same could be said of the Bakersfield CAlifornian which employs 11 ethnic minorities on its 89-person staff, or 12 percent, despite the town's having 63 percent of its population non-white. There are a few exceptions, however. The Imperial Valley Press employs five minorities/out of its 24 person newsroom or 20 percent in an area which 50 percent of the population is non white. And the Salinas Californian employs a similar percentage in an area which 37 percent of its residents are ethnic minorities. Those two newspapers are the only exceptions among 18 small newspapers.

Based on comments from editors who responded to this study, small and medium sized dailies would like to hire more non-whites but receive few applications --presumably for two reasons. Many small towns have negligible populations of Blacks or Asians or Mexicans; and minority news persons tend to hired (with better salaries) at larger papers. As the managing editor of the Ventura County Star Free Press wrote: "We receive a very low percentage of obvious sur-name minorities....It has, however, been my experience on several unfortunage occasions that anytime a qualified black or chicano comes along, that person is generally hired by a McClatchey paper, the L.A. Times or the Van Nuys Daily News.

"Ventura has an almost negligible minority population and that may account for the dearth of applications here by minorities. I would suspect, however, that it is more a matter of qualified minorities looking to more glamorous metropolitan papers (where they seem to have a decided advantage in getting hired if they are qualified.)"[8]

8 Stan Whisenhunt, managing editor, Ventura County Star Free Press, letter, Feb. 2, 1986.